

These minutes are draft and are subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to be held on 12 May 2015

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 MARCH 2015

Present: Councillor Richard Cook (Chairperson), Councillors Boyle, Chaundy, Gordon, Govier, Morgan, Murphy, Dianne Rees and Thorne.

Co-opted Members: Mrs P. Arlotte (Roman Catholic Representative), Carole Cobert (Church in Wales Representative), Catrin Lewis (Parent Governor Representative) and Hayley Smith (Parent Governor Representative)

Apologies: Councillors Govier and Morgan

61: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairperson reminded Members of their responsibility under Part III of the Members' Code of Conduct to declare any interest in general terms and to complete personal interest forms at the start of the meeting and then, prior to the commencement of the discussion of the item in question, specify whether it is a personal or prejudicial interest. If the interest is prejudicial Members would be asked to leave the meeting and if the interest is personal, Members would be invited to stay, speak and vote.

62: COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Chairperson welcomed Carole Cobert and Hayley Smith, who are two new independent members of the Committee, and Catrin Lewis, who is returning for a second term as an independent member of the Committee.

63: MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the meetings of 9 December 2014, 13 January 2015 and 3 February 2015 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairperson.

64: EDUCATION PERFORMANCE UPDATE

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Julia Magill (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Nick Batchelar (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning) and Carole Jones (Assistant Director of Education).

The purpose of this report was to present the Education Directorate performance report for Quarters 1, 2 and 3 of 2014/15 prior to its consideration by the Cabinet and to provide the Committee with an opportunity to receive an update on the progress being made in addressing the Estyn monitoring recommendations which are due to be reviewed by Estyn later this month.

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The Chairperson invited Councillor Magill to make a statement. Councillor Magill informed the Committee that the projected improvement in performance at Key Stage 4 Level 2 Plus for the summer of 2015 is 5% or more. The typical rate of improvement in previous years has been about 1%. Cardiff schools are improving at a faster rate than schools in other parts of Wales. The number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs) continues to fall. On the financial picture for Education, there is a projected overspend for this year and this is due to a number of factors. The Directorate now has a full compliment of senior managers. Out of county placements are costly and the demand for them is difficult to predict. Education is working with Children's Services to create provision within Cardiff for those children and young people who would otherwise have been placed out of county. The Welsh Government (WG) has made some significant in-year cuts to education grants, including grants to support the learning of those from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities.

The Chairperson invited questions from the Committee on Quarter 3 performance.

The Committee asked whether the local authority has been given any assurances that the WG will not make further cuts to grants next year and was advised that eleven grants have been rolled into one, but there are no indications that there will be further cuts to grants next year. Compared to other local authorities in Wales, Cardiff has a significant number of BME learners and the Director has taken steps to make sure that Cardiff schools are not affected disproportionately by these cuts.

Regarding BME grants, the Committee asked whether these are made on the basis of the number of learners from BME communities in a school or on the number of pupils whose first language is not English and enquired whether there will be a review to make sure that the grant money is spent in a way that is targeted. The Committee was informed that the award of the grant is based on the BME head count, and would include new arrivals from Europe and beyond. Much of the focus of the use of the grant is on language development. The way in which the grants are being spent has not been reviewed yet but there is an intention to do that.

The Committee pointed out that it is not ideal to be undertaking scrutiny of performance in Quarter 3 as late as March and asked how reporting can be improved to improve timelines. The Committee was advised that due to the recent focus on the budget the Committee has received all Quarter 3 reports at the same time.

The Committee noted that compliance on Personal Performance Development Reviews (PPDRs) is now at 86% and asked what the target for this is, as a compliance rate of more than 86% would be expected. The Committee was advised that there has been an improvement in the data since the report was written and compliance stands at about 94%. The aim is for 100% compliance.

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The Committee turned its attention to the progress made in addressing the Estyn recommendations and the Director gave a summary of this, beginning with Recommendation 3, which is as follows:

Recommendation 3 - Make sure that the arrangements for delivering school improvement services challenge and support all schools effectively, in order to improve standards for learners in all key stages

The Committee was advised that challenge and support have been strengthened. Last year there were concerns about the variability of challenge given by the Challenge Advisers (CAs). There has also been significant progress in escalating concerns about schools. The report identifies areas in which further improvement is needed, and these are as follows:

- 1) It is essential that the work of the CAs is embedded with the other support that schools receive from the local authority. CAs should have knowledge of the other ways in which the school is supported, such as through the local authority's HR service.
- 2) Challenge Cymru – There are six schools in the programme and not all are making the required progress. It is important that the local authority works with WG to make sure that performance in those schools improves.
- 3) It is important to continue to identify good practice and promote school-to-school support.

The Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee asked about the extent to which schools are supported as well as challenged. The Committee was advised that it is important to give schools support and challenge in that order. A large proportion of the local authority's budget goes to schools and it is important that it is used effectively. Poorly performing schools have to be helped to understand what is going wrong, how things can be improved and know where sources of support are, for example support from other schools.

The Committee suggested that improvement may still be too slow and asked what it is about the actions that are now being taken that will ensure that a generation of children will not be disadvantaged because of poor performance by schools. The Committee was advised that the performance of some of Cardiff's schools has stagnated over a number of years. Improvements are being made but these improvements have not yet gone far enough, and the pace of improvement does need to be quicker, but it takes a long time to tackle long-standing weaknesses and the underpinning arrangements described in the reports are the building blocks for improvement. Some secondary schools remain a challenge but it would not be right to characterise

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the whole system as failing. Schools are now working together to achieve improvement. A self-sustaining system for improvement is being created. The Consortium is working well, its leadership has been improved and it works to set up more robust challenge and support arrangements.

The Committee enquired about the support that is available to governing bodies, not just in the form of training but support when the school is failing. The Committee was advised that a very well regarded programme of training for those chairing governing bodies is to be rolled out across Cardiff. When a school is not performing well the chair of the governing body is involved in the discussions that are held with the headteacher about that.

The Committee was briefed on progress made against Recommendation 5, which is as follows:

Recommendation 5 - Improve performance management processes to ensure a consistent approach to delivering objectives

The Committee was advised that there are two key aspects of managing improvement and these are culture and structure. The factors for managing performance improvement have to be identified and acted on, and there has to be accountability. There should be a readiness to be challenged and an awareness of the key priority, which is good outcomes for children, can not be lost. Although there is a much greater awareness of this now, there are still other areas where further improvements can be made; the culture of improvement needs further strengthening; there has to be focus and coherence in planning; and there has to be accountability.

The Committee asked officers how confident they were that the improvements in performance management that are being made with the Consortium will enable the schools currently categorised as Red/Amber to move out of that category. The Committee was advised that one reason for greater confidence is that there is now more oversight of the CAs. Their communication with schools is clearer and more forthright and they are more consistent in their practice. They are under closer scrutiny and their reports have to be signed off.

The Chair invited Members to comment on ways in which progress might be made against Recommendation 6, which is as follows:

Recommendation 6 - Improve the scrutiny of local authority education service and partnership working

The following points were made:

- More links between the Committee and governing bodies could be useful, as well as a rolling programme of training for the Committee.

These minutes are draft and are subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to be held on 12 May 2015

- Headteachers of schools have attended meetings of the Committee and it would be helpful if the Committee could have more face to face contact with headteachers.
- Pre-meetings are helpful as the questions to be asked can be identified before the meeting.
- The style of the 'nitty-gritty' reports on education that the Committee now receives is an improvement on previous reports.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending the meeting, for their presentation and for answering questions from Members.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the issues raised during the Way Forward discussion.

65: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE MONITORING REPORT – NATIONAL CATEGORISATION AND SCHOOLS CAUSING CONCERN

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Julia Magill (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Nick Batchelar (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning) and Angela Kent (Head of Achievement and Inclusion).

The Director of Education has identified certain performance areas which are available to be scrutinised during the year. The Committee has already received performance reports on outcomes of inspections for schools inspected in the period September 2010 to December 2014 and on performance in literacy and numeracy. This report on national categorisation and schools causing concern was the third report in this programme of scrutiny.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Magill to make a statement. Councillor Magill advised the Committee that the new national categorisation system is a marked improvement. The fundamental difference is that the banding system is now absolute and not relative. Every school in the city could be in the top band as long as it reached the required standard.

Angela Kent gave a presentation, following which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee asked how inconsistencies in teaching are being addressed and what support is available for pupils with challenging behaviour. The Committee was advised that there is a challenging behaviour support team, but if teaching is of good quality then pupils are more engaged and so there is less challenging behaviour. Children may have a behaviour support plan. Often challenging behaviour arises when children have low self-esteem, perhaps because their language skills are not good and this causes them to have difficulties with their work.

These minutes are draft and are subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to be held on 12 May 2015

The Committee asked why there are so many schools in Cardiff that are categorised as Red and whether there is anything endemic in the city's schools that prevents those schools from moving into the Green or Amber categories. The Committee was advised that in terms of the performance of its schools Cardiff had previously become inward looking; there was not enough challenge. Poor practice and poor performance was allowed to continue for too long. Also, the impact of poor teaching is greater on children who come from the more disadvantaged communities. A cultural change was needed so that there was a recognition that the city's schools were not performing as well as they should be.

The Committee asked when the next categorisation of schools will take place and was advised that schools will be officially re-categorised in a year's time, although self-assessment of any potential for re-categorisation will occur before then.

The Committee suggested that there seems to be more of an endemic issue at secondary level than at primary and asked why this might be. The Committee was advised that there has been a recognition that some secondary schools have been coasting, and some schools have not been properly categorised in the past. In some parts of the system, pupils' work is now marked more objectively but at Key Stage 2 and 3 marking is still based on teacher assessment. The Consortium is now moderating through an external group to ensure that there is a level of objectivity around standards at a particular level. This should give more confidence about the true position on performance. Also, it is important to look not just at overall attainment but at the improvements pupils make across the system.

The Committee asked whether teaching is augmented by additional support in those schools categorised as Red and was advised that schools that are in significant difficulty do warrant a greater degree of support, as well as additional scrutiny. Active brokering of support is a key part of a programme of improvement.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending the meeting, for their presentation and for answering questions from Members.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the issues raised during the Way Forward discussion.

66: 21st CENTURY SCHOOLS PROGRAMME – REALIGNMENT

The Chairperson welcomed Councillor Julia Magill (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Nick Batchelar (Director of Education and Lifelong Learning) and Janine Nightingale (Head of Schools Organisation, Access & Planning).

The purpose of this report was to provide the Committee with an opportunity to consider the rationale for the proposed realignment of the 21st Century Schools Programme.

These minutes are draft and are subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee to be held on 12 May 2015

Janine Nightingale gave a presentation, following which the Chairperson invited questions from the Committee.

The Committee asked officers how the Committee can be assured that the proposed changes will bring better outcomes. The Committee was advised that capital investment is a key leader to improving outcomes. Good school environments promote good outcomes. These proposals are part of a strategy to improve performance and part of an aim to encourage engagement between schools and the wider community. The aim is to provide primary schools with a two-form entry or above.

The Committee commented that it was disappointing that youth and play centres are being closed in parts of the city while at the same time proposals for the building of new schools are being made. The Committee asked whether the youth and play services could be offered use of the new buildings. The Committee was advised that the local authority is looking to introduce a new model for the Youth Service and some schools have come forward to offer help with this. Resources need to be freed up so that services can be commissioned. Part of the problem is not spaces but people to operate organisations.

The Committee asked what consideration is being given to the siting of the new schools, pointing out that it creates real difficulties for parents when schools are placed away from residential areas. The Committee was advised that some of the new schools will be on existing school sites but in a compact urban area like Cardiff there are difficulties finding suitable sites. In future, the local authority may have to move towards having two-storey school buildings.

The Committee expressed concern over the lack of nursery provision for faith schools and asked how many non-faith schools lack this provision. Officers advised that they would obtain that information for the Committee.

The Committee enquired if a site has yet been identified for the new high schools in the west of Cardiff. The Committee was advised that there will be consultation on this. It is proposed that the Glyn Derw School will be transferred on to the Michaelston College site.

The Committee asked what has been learned from the amalgamation of Rumney High School and Llanrumney High School to form Eastern High School. The Committee was advised that one good aspect of the amalgamation was the way in which the pupils participated in the re-branding, choosing the name and uniform for the new school. Bringing the two school communities together went well.

The Committee was concerned about the significant maintenance backlog. The Committee was advised that there is a robust, prioritised asset management programme and £3 million per year funding for this. It will take time to reduce the backlog. The Committee enquired whether deferred

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projects will either be included in the programme or prioritised and was advised that deferred projects will be prioritised.

The Committee asked whether more money for the schools programme is likely to be available over the next few years and was advised that more may be available from the Local Development Plan. It is expected that Cardiff will have two new secondary schools and five new primary schools.

The Chairperson thanked the Cabinet Member and officers for attending the meeting, for their presentation and for answering questions from Members.

AGREED: That the Chairperson on behalf of the Committee writes to the Cabinet Member highlighting the issues raised during the Way Forward discussion.

67: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on 7 April 2015 at 4.30pm in Committee Room 4, County Hall

The meeting closed at 6.00pm.

Signed _____
Chairperson

Date _____